Guest Editorial

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Guest Editorial

The utilization of organization development (OD) to implement organizational change is assumed to help participants to go beyond superficial change (van Nistelrooij and Sminia, 2009). The principal ground for this belief is that the underlying assumptions and values which govern participants' behaviors are then being addressed. As a field as well as a profession, OD has always combined a normative perspective on human behavior with high ambitions of achieving both enhanced performance and human fulfillment (Burke, 1987; Jamieson and Worley, 2008). Yet these ambitions, as well as OD's distinguishing dual focus on individual and collective development have been heavily criticized for disregarding economic interests, societal and strategic concerns about sustainability, empowerment issues, and human resource development and corporate governance questions (Bradford and Burke, 2005; Gallos, 2006; Burke, 2008). OD incorporates multiple perspectives that seem to guarantee an ongoing debate and it is therefore a continuously evolving field. It can be argued that there is a certain irony to OD that, by going below the surface, it recognizes the complexity of the process of change, yet theoretically it is relatively ill equipped to deal with this (Beer and Walton, 1987; Sashkin and Burke, 1987; Woodman, 1989; Dunphy, 1996; Worley and Feyerherm, 2003; Burke, 2008). The purpose of this Special Issue is to explore some theoretical avenues to provide OD with more conceptual depth. The common thread underlying the contributions in this issue is to link OD assumptions, concepts, and practice with existing social and behavioral theory to provide a more thorough understanding of organizational change and to help OD practitioners onwards.

Recently, there has been some debate with regard to OD's theoretical roots and whether and how OD has changed and developed over time. Bushe and Marshak (2009) made a clear distinction between a diagnostic approach and a dialogic approach in OD, with connotations that the 'newer' dialogic approach should replace the 'older' diagnostic approach (see also Marshak and Grant, 2008). The diagnostic approach is based on the ideas of classical science, positivism, and a modernist philosophy. The dialogic approach, by contrast, is more interpretative, based on social constructionism and a critical and postmodern philosophy.

In a reaction, Oswick (2009) argued against the clear dichotomy implied by the two approaches and put forward that it would be much more fruitful to treat these distinctive points of view as a continuum, that OD can be a bit of both, and that it is maybe more a matter of emphasis than of exclusion. The choice of approach should be appropriate to the situation when OD and change are being considered and applied in concrete instances. Wolfram Cox's (2009) comments are in a similar vein. She added that if there is a need with regard to the future development of OD, it would be the further exploration of what she considers to be the newer emergent dialogic approach but without dismissing the diagnostic approach as irrelevant or outdated. Woodman (2008) noticed a similar development in the OD field as Marshak and Grant (2008) but describes it more as a swing of the pendulum. These swings tend to be presented as replacements of the old by the new but when considered from a distance there is much continuity in the core. Different aspects of this core tend to be rediscovered and subsequently emphasized over the course of time. As Woodman put it: 'We can introduce a new wine, but some characteristics of the wine's container are always there' (2008, pp. 36–37). He also argued that such a debate reflects wider issues with regard to ontology, epistemology, and human nature, and that there might be benefit in exploring more general social and behavioral theories to see what it brings to bear upon the OD field. In a reply, Marshak and Bushe (2009) prefer to stick with their clear dichotomy. They recognize the difficulty of associating the respective positions with 'old' and 'new' and they do acknowledge a degree of commonality because both approaches refer to OD and change.

With regard to these wider issues, down through the centuries in the Western world there has been what amounts to a continuing debate over what Rychlak (1968) sees as the relative merits of two types of reasoning: dialectical and demonstrative. Dialectical reasoning is associated with Plato. It is about introspection, unique processes, and subjective or local meaning. Demonstrative reasoning, however, is connected with Aristotle. This is about extraspection, regularity, and general objective knowledge. An argument can be made that what Marshak and Bushe (2009) have dubbed as dialogic resembles Rychlak's dialectical approach, whereas diagnostic bears a close resemblance to demonstrative. Interestingly, Lewin (1931) made a similar distinction, but he compared Aristotle with Galileo. Aristotle's criterion of scientific law was the predictable and ordered repetition of the same phenomenon, where only a large number of cases established laws. It was necessary then for a scientific inquiry to study as many similar cases as possible in order to establish laws of general validity. But Galileo's criteria for validity were altogether different. For him, the single case was just as valid as the law of the free fall in a vacuum, a scientifically acceptable phenomenon which does not exist at all in real life. It was not important whether a given process occurred only once or twice, frequently or permanently. Historic frequency was not at all decisive in determining the 'lawfulness' of a phenomenon. Rychlak (1968, p. 256) also put forward that 'the history of dialectical vs. demonstrative reasoning is as old as the history of thought'. He continues that 'it seems highly likely that both must be taken as givens within thought, and that which one is emphasized as superior at any given time over the centuries must be seen in the context of just that purpose a proponent had in mind when he argued for one or the other of these types of reasoning'. Rychlak (1968,

p. 256) ends his point with: 'This is the lesson of history: the fact that during various periods, either one of these patterns was held up as superior, or more elegant, more accurate, less mythical, less critical, depending upon what case the proponent was trying to make.'

What we can make of this debate between the dialogic/dialectical and diagnostic/demonstrative positions is that it is something that comes and goes and is part of the continuous development of the field. What characterizes the current state of affairs is that the swing is momentarily moving from diagnostic/demonstrative to dialogic/dialectical. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to dismiss too easily insights derived from one end of the spectrum in favor of insights from the other end. Interestingly, Lewin, in 1931, made the case for the Galilean (dialogic/dialectical) mode of thinking. We asked scholars and management consultants in the fields of change management, strategic management, and human resource development to explicate what they think would be a useful theoretical foundation to underlie OD and to demonstrate how this theoretical foundation helps to improve OD practice. As it happened, both the distinctions that have been made as part of this debate and the favored emphasis on a dialogical/dialectical approach became apparent in what was presented to us.

In the first article of this Special Issue, Korten, De Caluwé and Geurts revisit the earlier Worley and Feyerherm (2003) study and conduct a Delphi study among Dutch OD practitioners and scholars. Their mapping of some of the basic underlying views on the future of OD reflects the diversity and complexity of modern organizational life and indicates the need for a sophisticated theoretical understanding of organizational change. There appear to be very distinct priorities and values present in the community of Dutch OD practitioners, with some of them posing compelling dilemmas. It seems therefore unavoidable that OD is characterized by different preferences, styles, and ambitions. Yet, the authors suggest that there is less of a clear bifurcation as put forward by Marshak and Grant (2008) and Bushe and Marshak (2009). Following on from Woodman (2008), their taxonomy of six types of OD practitioners can be spread out over a continuum between diagnostic/demonstrative and dialogic/dialectic extremes, with 'evidence seekers' positioned towards the diagnostic/demonstrative end and 'sense makers' positioned towards the dialogic/dialectic end.

Using Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionist framework, Van Nistelrooij and Sminia's contribution to the Special Issue provides a theoretical understanding of what it is about organizations that can change as a consequence of an OD intervention. Berger and Luckmann's understanding of institutionalization, social order, and social change tends to be associated with the dialogic/dialectic end of the spectrum. Van Nistelrooij and Sminia argue that Berger and Luckmann's reasoning indicates that there are basically three types of change that can occur within an organization. Based on that, they end with a discussion of some implications for OD practice, specifically with regard to 'programming' dialogue as the main vehicle for change.

In the third article, Werkman investigates actual OD practice in a police organization from a sensemaking perspective and is able to make suggestions with regard to OD assumptions, underlying theory and OD inspired interventions. The author puts forward that people try to construct a coherent account of a

change situation to make it plausible and to be able to decide on appropriate actions. This implies that by looking at this sensemaking from a sensemaking perspective, OD practitioners are offered insight into the patterns of action that make up the course of the change process itself. This insight can then be used to develop a model or causal map of what is going on, which can then be used to decide on the appropriate intervention to move the change process on. Werkman puts forward that a sensemaking approach helps OD practitioners to better understand the phenomena that they are confronted with while 'doing' organizational change and that OD interventions can be managed better when participants' habituated patterns of sensemaking and action are taken into account. Sensemaking also tends to be associated with the dialogic/dialectic end of the spectrum.

Where does all of this leave OD for the moment? The conclusions of the articles speak volumes. Overall it can be argued that, with the recognition that organizational change is a sophisticated process, OD should be a sophisticated field of both study and practice. There should be room for different approaches and points of view and there should also be room for debate. However, sophistication means theoretical substance. There are ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions that need to be addressed. What this Special Issue shows is that drawing from what is available in social and behavioral theory does provide OD with more depth and understanding of the process, and consequently moves the field of OD onwards towards a more sophisticated change practice.

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